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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000166

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FOR THE SECRETARY AND EUR A/S FRIED FROM AMBASSADOR VALLEE
NSC FOR DAMON WILSON

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PINR SOCI LO

SUBJECT: THEMES FOR SLOVAK PM MIKULAS DZURINDA'S MARCH 13
MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)
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¶1. (C) Madame Secretary, when the President welcomes Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda to the White House on March 13, he will be welcoming a true friend of the United States. Dzurinda has intentionally and very vocally worked to advance U.S. interests in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, even as he has advanced Slovak national interests and turned Slovakia's economy into an example of free-market reform. His Transatlantic outlook has made Slovakia a valuable ally in the region, within NATO, the EU, and, most recently, within the UN Security Council.

A LEADER IN TRANSFORMATIONAL DIPLOMACY...

¶2. (C) Slovakia is one of the places where the U.S. and Europe work best together; it is one of the linchpins holding fast the Transatlantic relationship. Slovakia maintains an active and constructive role in transformational diplomacy in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. Under Dzurinda's leadership, Slovakia continued its close partnership with the U.S. in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) by sending Slovak troops to serve abroad in Afghanistan and Iraq. Dzurinda took these initiatives even though it was not the politically popular thing to do in Slovakia, or in Europe.

...NURTURING THE TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP

¶3. (C) During his visit with the President, Dzurinda plans to emphasize the importance of Transatlantic cooperation. More importantly, Dzurinda misses no opportunity to take his EU colleagues to task for being insufficiently supportive of such cooperation. He does not believe that any EU member should have to choose between friendship with the U.S. and friendship with the rest of Europe. He intentionally took a friendlier approach toward UK PM Blair's EU budget proposals than his Visegrad-4 colleagues, partly in deference to his appreciation for Blair's emphasis on the Transatlantic partnership.

¶4. (C) It is fitting that Dzurinda's visit comes shortly before elections in Belarus and Ukraine, where the Slovak government and NGOs are assisting reformers and developing civil society. Slovakia is taking the lead in organizing election observers from the Visegrad-4 countries for the Belarus vote, and will have an important role in devising the EU response to the conduct of the election. The Dzurinda government is also grappling with Moscow's attempts to increase Russian involvement in the gas pipelines that traverse Slovakia to provide energy supplies to western

Europe. PM Dzurinda would be pleased to provide his views of Slovakia's relationship with Russia and his own assessment of Russian President Putin.

A BATTLE ON HIS HANDS

15. (C) Prime Minister Dzurinda is in a tough spot politically: with impending elections June 17, he is trailing in Slovakia's polls, has lost a longtime coalition partner, and is likely hoping that the optics of the White House visit will improve his image as a statesman and a leader back home. He will definitely bring up the topic of the visa waiver program (albeit in a less direct, less forceful manner than some of his V-4 colleagues), and will be hoping for public acknowledgment that progress is being made on the roadmap announced jointly with President Bush during his visit to Slovakia in February 2005. In addition to reaching milestones on the roadmap (for example, the signing of an extradition treaty), our Embassy is working with the Slovaks on specific benefits -- such as mutually lengthening various visa reciprocity schedules -- short of immediate entry into VWP that can provide benefits to average Slovaks. We will continue to work these smaller issues in the run-up to March 13, and will suggest how we can publicize this progress. The GOS recognizes the difficulties in moving along the roadmap, but also believes that we can do more to soften political resistance within Congress.

CLOSE UNSC COOPERATION, BUT CAUTION ABOUT KOSOVO

16. (C) We are off to a very fast and productive start with Slovakia as a new, non-permanent member of the UNSC. They are proactive, seek out our positions on the issues, and

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usually concur. A/S Silverberg visits here March 6-7 to cement this cooperation.

17. (C) A Slovak foreign policy priority that the PM is likely to raise with the President is the western Balkans. The Slovaks are concerned that the U.S. and others are pushing too hard and too quickly for Kosovo independence. Specifically, they think we need to be more attentive to the steps needed to bring Belgrade along as a willing and invested negotiating partner. This was a highlight of Foreign Minister Kukan's meeting with you last October, and, as Kukan told you then, Slovakia is willing to help in efforts with Belgrade. Meanwhile, Slovak diplomacy is producing meaningful benefits on related issues in the region. MFA Political Director Miroslav Lajcak, appointed by Javier Solana as the EU's "facilitator" on the Montenegrin referendum, is bringing the parties together skillfully on a compromise formula for conducting the referendum in May.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

18. (C) Part of Dzurinda's visit to the U.S. will focus on emphasizing the importance of developing education and research -- particularly in science and technology. We are currently finalizing the draft of a new Science and Technology agreement that we will present to the Slovak government to symbolize our joint interest in enhancing cooperation in these fields. Sound and innovative pro-private sector economic policies have put Slovakia on the map as a good place for FDI. That FDI has benefited Slovaks, but Slovakia needs to attract more investment and raise the technological level of that investment in order to compete and grow quality employment opportunities. Dzurinda also wants to emphasize his support for improving Slovakia's higher education system.

CHARTING A COURSE

¶9. (C) Under Dzurinda's leadership, Slovakia has made significant progress exporting freedom and democracy, and Dzurinda would now like to leave a lasting legacy by moving Slovakia forward towards a knowledge-based economy. The Prime Minister hopes that his visit to Washington will help institutionalize the progress and direction he has charted for Slovakia, to help cement the special relationship between Slovakia and the United States regardless of the results of June elections.

VALLEE